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September 30, 1976

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Discussion of the Backfire with Frank Slatinshek, Chief Counsel, House Armed Services Committee

1. Yesterday I met with Mr. Slatinshek to explain the Director's strong objections to a recent Aviation Week article stating that CIA had revised its estimate of the Backfire's performance to accommodate Secretary Kissinger. Mr. Slatinshek invited his R&D staff man, Tony Battista, to sit in. I explained that if they wished to get into technical details, we would be happy to offer up Mr. Hineman, D/OWI.

2. I told Mr. Slatinshek that CIA had in fact revised its estimate of the Backfire's performance, but that Secretary Kissinger had absolutely nothing to do with it. We have never been happy with the estimated performance characteristics and there has long been a divergence in the Intelligence Community over what this aircraft can do. I explained that in early 1975 OWI had decided to perform another engineering analysis

[redacted] McDonald-Douglas was selected as the contractor to perform this reexamination.

3. What emerged from this analysis was clear indication, so far as we were concerned, that the Backfire is lighter than originally thought and that its engines have less thrust than we thought. From this, we conclude that the aircraft has less intercontinental capability than originally estimated. I pointed out that we are talking about an unrefueled, high-altitude, subsonic mission and that with inflight refueling, the Backfire would indeed have intercontinental capability.

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4. I explained to Messrs. Slatinshek and Battista that the Soviets refer to this aircraft as a TU-22M; that we have information indicating it is a follow-on design to the TU-22; and that thus far it has been deployed to intermediate-range bomber bases. All of this further suggests the aircraft is designed for a peripheral attack role.

5. I gave the new estimated radius (1700-2300 n.m.) and range (3300-4300 n.m.). I noted we have had some indication the Soviets might be preparing to upgrade their inflight refueling capability by converting IL-76s to tankers and that if this happened and we saw Backfires practicing refueling, we would certainly have to consider an intercontinental capability.

6. Mr. Battista attempted to link our reassessment with the B-1 bomber and I informed him we were talking about two entirely different airplanes, with vastly different capabilities and roles, which could not be accurately compared. Mr. Slatinshek, who often plays the devil's advocate, asked why we felt we were in the right ball park now when we had not been before. I explained to him that we had never been comfortable with the original estimates and felt they had to be worked again. We had considerably more confidence in the new figures than the old. He also asked why we and the Air Force could not come up with an agreed set of characteristics somewhere between both positions. I said we have to provide the best answer we can and not create a marriage of convenience just to keep people happy. The line of questioning was not hostile, but as I have found before with this Committee staff, there is some skepticism whenever we part company with the Pentagon. Mr. Slatinshek said he would like to hear the Air Force's side of the story and I suggested he wait until he had an opportunity to read the study and then go over it in detail with Mr. Hineman.

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cc: OLC
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